ETHNOGRAPHY OF VILLAGE NOORPUR SHAHAN (BARI IMAM) ISLAMABAD

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Abstract: Myths help societies make sense of the world around them, justifying cultural values and social norms. Religion is the chief force bringing social change, as the beliefs and concepts prevalent and plausible in each society are the means by which human cognition is organized and designed. Belief in witches, ancestral spirits, and angry or beneficent Gods is easily accepted in various cultures because our human cognitive capacities and intuitive understanding of the natural and social world are dependent upon them. (Scupin and DeCorse 2009). The purpose of the present research is to study the people of Noorpur Shahan and the cultural practices prevalent in this area. Moreover the focus is to reveal the impact of shrines and its culture on the contiguous community. A sample of 100 devotees were purposively selected and interviewed with the help of structured questionnaire from Noor Pur Shahan village of Capital Territory Islamabad. Villagers are connected with shrine in all aspects and the culture of shrine and neighboring area is nearly identical.

Key words: Shrine, Sufi Saint, Belief, Culture, Rituals, Sajjada Nishine and Auqaf.

INTRODUCTION
The study was conducted in village Noorpur Shahan Bari Imam Islamabad, District Islamabad. It is a sub area of Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Islamabad. It is situated on Plateau of Margalla Mountains just behind the Prime Minister House Islamabad and about 4km northeast of the Diplomatic Enclave. Other areas near to the village include Quaid-i-Azam University, Bara Kahu, Saidpur and Mulpur village.

In Pothohar region there are various Shrines, where followers visit to deal with their social and psychological problems (Khan and Sajj 2011). Shrines are deeply connected with the “Sufi Salasul” (spiritual orders) which was established and named after some of the leading Aulia Allah (Sufi friends of God) (Khan, et al. 2014). “Noorpur Shahan Bari Imam” popularly known only as “Bari Imam” is situated at the foot of Margallah hills and is famous for the mirror-studded shrine of Hazrat Abdul Latif. The Shrine of Hazrat Bari Imam was originally built on the orders of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (Pakistan 1999). It is at least 450 years old and built on top of medieval sites.

Shah Abdul Latif Qadri Qazmi Mashhaddi R.A (Bari Imam) is a renowned Sufi Saint of the Pothohar region (Pakistan 1999). He was considered to be righteous by the virtue of being pious (Platteau 2011), true follower and preacher of Islam. He worshipped Allah (God) at a number of places (Batool, et al. 2014). He was a Wali Allah and spiritual guide of ‘Silsila-e-Qadria’, a ‘Tariqa’ which claimed spiritual supremacy over all other Sufi orders (Loimeier 2013), of Hazrat Syed Abdul Qadir Jilani (ra).

A study conducted by the students of Indian university, revealed that urban people were found to be more superstitious than those having rural background (George and Sreedhar 2006). In Pakistan, majority of the population is Muslim (Farooq and Kayani 2012) who visit shrines due to their dedication and traditional orientation towards Sufism. Tradition of Sufism reflects that spiritual resources provide coping strategy for various issues of the contemporary world (Voll 1992). The Shrine of Bari Imam is one of the most popular Shrines of South Asia. Followers and believers of Hazrat Bari Imam belong to various areas of Pakistan and come from various countries all over the world. Diverse range of rituals is practiced here every day (Batool, et al. 2015).

Most of the villagers living in adjacent area are native and are Sajjada Nishine families. They are associated with Shrine in all aspects like their belief, culture, rituals etc. They perform variety of their religious and cultural rituals at shrine and take part
in shrines ritual as well. The remaining community is also connected with the shrine by means of economy and because their means of earning. Due to all these reasons, the culture of shrine and neighboring area is nearly identical. The major purpose of the present research is to study the people of Noorpur Shahan and their cultural practices. Moreover to check the impact of shrines and its culture on contiguous community.

MATERIALS AND METHODS
For the sake of present research in Village Noorpur Shahan of Capital Territory Islamabad, sample of 100 devotees were used to collect data by using different research methods; SECF, Structured Questionnaire, Formal and Informal Interviews, FGD and Case Study Methods. The total population of the area was recorded to be 33,000 according to the voter list. Data was entered in SPSS and MSE for analyses.

RESULTS
According to the data collected through socio-economic census forms, the age distribution of respondents at Bari Imam is as follows; 49% respondents were in between the age of 20-40, 43% were from the age of 40-60, 6% were in between the age of 60-80, and 2% were in between the age of 80-100. Following figure shows high percentage of individuals in the first two age slots that perform various rituals. It is important to note that in this age people are relatively in better mental and physical health, are energetic, and thus can comprehend the meanings and importance of religious rituals, symbols and beliefs. Lastly, people of this age group are mostly acquiring education, doing business and are busy with other practical life matters, so they are more inclined to visit the shrines for “munnat”, to get or fulfil their needs or desires which would pave their future course.

Fig.1. Age Distribution of Respondents

It was found that the sample selected from the population that visited the shrines included 51% males, 44% females and 5% were transgender. The high percentage of men and women shows that there is no restriction for women or men to visit the shrine and perform its practices (ritual). This freedom of practice and visits is not restricted to males and females only, instead it was observed that transgender(s) also visit shrines to perform different religious rituals (like manajaat (reciting holy songs of Sufi Saints) and mannat) in contrast to strict gender restrictions when it comes to visiting other religious places like mosques etc.

Fig.2. Gender Distribution of Respondents

The lesson of sectarianism is not delivered through the channels of shrine including mosque and imam bargah. The sample showed their affiliation towards different sects. Around 68% of sample was belonging to Ahl-e-Sunnat and 32% were to Ahl-e-Tashayyo. As shown in figure, the percentage of Ahl-e-Sunnat is greater than Ahl-e-Tashayyo. The members of Auqaf in the sample are from Ahl-e-Sunnat and Mujawers are from Ahl-e-Tashayyo. Whereas, most of the respondent from neighbouring community and other regular visitors were also of Ahl-e-Sunnat sect.

Fig.3. Sect Distribution of Respondents

Income of the sample was compared by making four different slots of income in PKR where 59% earned between 0-40000 monthly income(s), around 29% earned between 40000-80000, 4% earned 80000-120000 and the incomes of remaining 8% were between 120000-160000. Most of the respondents were found to be financially weak and less educated. Most of them were shop keepers and drivers. Whereas, some worked at government organizations like Auqaf but due to less
education they did not earn more like their educated counterparts.

![Figure 4. Income Distribution of Respondents](image)

Ratio of education was low. The reasons were firstly, poverty or fewer resources and secondly less educational institutions and poor quality education in the existing schools of the catchment area of the shrine. It was found that 46% were under matriculation, 14% of sample had education till matriculation, 12% were only educated till inter collegiate, 16% go to/round about bachelors and only 12% had master’s degree.

![Figure 1. Education Distribution of Respondents](image)

### Family Structure

The data which was collected in response of question about family structure. After data analysis, result shows that the family structure was majorly ‘Joint family system’ and the bonding of relatives is strong. Family is not only a nuclear unit but it includes horizontal relationships as well, for example brothers and their wives. In contrast, graph also shows high percentage of ‘Nuclear family system’ that is 39% and 1% of ‘Extended family system’. It is because the Shrine of Bari Imam is a sub area of Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Islamabad.

### Occupation

The percentage which is shown in figure was collected in response of selected sample. When occupation was asked to respondents, 32% were government employees, 23% were working in private organizations, 31% were unemployed, 11% had their own business and 3% have other resources. Common occupations of this area were driving and shop keeping. Numbers of Auqaf employees in sample were not regular. They were working on daily wages that's why percentage goes to/round about 23% of private employees. Research area is included in rural areas of Islamabad. Women are not spouse to go for job and depending on their males. So that high percentage shows unemployment.

![Figure 7 Occupation](image)

**DISCUSSION**

The research locale, village Noorpur Shahan Bari Imam, is situated at the foot of Margallah hills and famous for the mirror-studded shrine of Hazrat Abdul Latif, popularly known as Bari Imam. This shrine was originally built on the order of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. It is the rural area of Islamabad. The old name of this area was choorpur before the arrival of Hazrat Shah Abdul Latif Kazmi. Noorpur village originated in Medieval age and the shrine of Bari Imam is built on top of Medieval sites, therefore it is at least 450 years old. Remnant of Medieval features can still be found in this village (District Census Report of Islamabad 1999).
The climate of Village Noorpur Shahan is ample pleasant, healthy, pollution free, full of water resources and lush green. The winds blow mostly from the north or south-east in whole year and atypical version of a humid subtropical climate, with hot, humid summers accompanied by a monsoon season followed by cool winters. *Pothohari* language is normally used to speak. The total population of the area is 33,000 only according to voter list. Ethnically, *shalwar, kameez and chadar* are generally used to wear. Females like to use ornaments, bangles, and necklaces in different occasions, festivals and marriages. Wheat and maize are staple food grains. *Tandoori* bread and vegetables are mostly used. The literacy rate is normal. It will increase because almost all new generation is going to school and universities. There are two High Schools for girls and boys and numerous private schools are also situated. The research locale is not a perfect rural setting. Its culture is mixed and brought change in traditional mind sets (Ahmed, et al. 2013) because of surrounding areas. Various advancements have been occurred in their life styles like in clothing, food, language, education, technology etc. It has proper power supply and some even installed UPS and electricity generators.

The other facilities like telephone, post office, mobile service, family planning centers are available in the village except government hospital and Gas. Gas calendar is commonly used here for cooking purposes. A huge *bazaar* is also present where all kind of goods are available. There are different kinds of factions on the basis of politics, sect and caste. They support *PML-N* and *Pakistan Peoples Part*. Majority of locale belongs to *Ahle Sunnat* and *Ahle Tashayyo*. Likewise numerous castes are there like *Sadaat, Abbasi, choudhary, Rajpoot, Malik, Awan* etc.

Driving and shop keeping are the common occupations but some people also work in governmental and private organizations. It is observed that the occupation of locals and some outsiders is associated to or in other words is depended on shrine of Hazrat Bari Imam. Thousands of people come to visit shrine per day. They purchase various goods like flowers, *chadors*, sweets, food, bangles, books etc from the hawkers and shops adjacent to shrine. Likewise these people travel on locale transport. Hence, shopkeepers and drivers earn money.

Pakistani people view *Sufi* saints as the embodiment of Islamic virtue and consider them true *Faqirs* (impoverished ones) characterized by a life of piety, self-sacrifice and public service (Rozehnal 2006). Hazrat Syed Abdul Latif (Bari Imam) is a well renowned Sufi Saint of the Potohar region. His father name is Hazrat Syed Sakhi Shah Mehmood Badshah. He belongs to Karsal village of district Chakwal. By caste, He is Kazmi Syed and links up to Hazrat Imam Musa Kazim (AS) and then to Hazrat Imam Ali ul Murtaza (AS). Whereas in *Tariqat*, he is a *Wali* and spiritual guide of *Silsila-e-Qadria*, a tariqa which claimed spiritual supremacy over all other Sufi orders, of Hazrat Syed Abdul Qadir Jilani. Hazrat Bari Imam received the sacred inner dimensions of spiritual knowledge from Hayat- al-Mir (*Zinda Pir*) and He gave him the name of Bari Imam. Bari Imam converted countless Hindus into Muslims during the teachings of Islam at this place. That’s the reason the village name choorpur replaced into Noorpur Shahan Bari Imam. The family of Hazrat Bari Imam had shifted from village Karsaal Chakwal to village Bagh Kalan now known as Aabpara Islamabad. He had performed miracles, when he was child. He had used to spend most of his time in worship of God, along with performing normal activities of social life. Hazrat Bari Imam was reportedly born in 1026 Hijri (1617) and died at the age of 90. He was laid to rest about 332 years ago. He had predicted for coming into the existence of Islamabad city close to his shrine. He was pious, righteous and true follower and preacher of Islam. He worshipped of Allah (God) in number of places in Margalla Hills and Kashmir.

He got education of Hades, *Fiqah, Muntaq*, and Mathematics and get specialization in *Ilm-ul-Kalam, Ilm-ul-Adab, Ilm-e-Maani, Ilm-e-Tib* and *Ilm-e-Rohani*. For religious and spiritual specialty, he traveled towards Kashmir, Badakshan, Mashhad Moqaddas, Najaf Ashraf, Karbala and Bokhara. In the beginning, He spent his time as *Salik* and in the last period of his life as *Majzub*. His famous surnames are *Sultan-ul-Salikeen, Rais-ul-Arifeen, Rais-ul-Ashiqeen, Zubda-tul-Awlia*, and *Qut-ul-Aqtab*.

As mentioned above, village Noorpur Shahan Bari Imam is famous for the mirror-studded shrine of Hazrat Abdul Latif, popularly known as Bari Imam. Most of the villagers living in adjacent area are native and are *Sajjada Nishine* families. They are associated with Shrine in all aspects like their belief, religion, culture, rituals etc. They perform variety of their religious and cultural rituals at shrine and take part in shrines ritual as well. Remaining community also connected with shrine because the occupation of locals and some outsiders is associated to or in other words is depended on shrine of Hazrat Bari
Imam. Due to all these reasons, the culture of shrine and neighboring area is nearly identical. In current situation, the shrine of Hazrat Bari Imam is under construction. Hence, the main room where the Sufi Saint is buried remains closed. At 10 o’clock, Baba Fayyaz opens this room for Tilawat and cleaning purpose daily. Hazrat Bari Imam opens his door at 3 am early in the morning for pilgrims. Muslim saints and Shrines, known as dargahs attract diverse range of pilgrims religiously (Batool, et al. 2014b). Hundred and thousand of visible and invisible Ashiqeen dance around the shrine consistently. Whereas, it becomes close for few hours and the closing time is 11pm daily. The grave of Hazrat Bari Imam is in front of main gate of Shrine, while his two khulfa Shah Hussain and Mitha Shah are buried in left side of him. Their graves are in previous condition because of dispute between Sajjada Nishine families and Auqaf. Lungar khana, much and office of chairman Auqaf are also located in the left side close to the main gate. There is a Musafir Khana in a very poor condition although bathrooms are in right side of shrine. Outside of shrine, a huge market and hotels covered almost all sides of it, where all kind of goods are available including flowers, chadars, agarbatti, candles, food, Degs, ornaments etc. Van stop is also very nearer to it.

The shrine of Hazrat Bari Imam is under control of Auqaf, institution of Federal Ministry of Religious Affairs, since 1976. The management of shrine falls under this institution. 40 employees work at this shrine, 17 are regular and rest is hire on daily wages by civil defense (Batool, et al. 2014a). Hazrat Bari Imam had four disciples, who had served him. Their names had Inayat Shah, Dabung Shah, Shah Hussain and Mittha Shah. They had managed the shrine affairs after the death of the Hazrat Bari Imam. With the passage time, the management of shrine was further transferred to the next generations of time after the demise of four disciples.

For the right of shrine, a committee is made to inspect Auqaf. In which 6-7 persons are the decision makers and Auqaf is just more about as name here. Due to these few people there are disputes and construction of shrine is also slow. They make security as an excuse and don’t hold religious and shrine rituals which were held for many years like Urs, Qawali, Mahfil-e-Naat, Mahfil-e-Sama, dhamaal etc. According to community and believers Auqaf is consider to be incapable. At this time, the role of Auqaf is zero percent at shrine. All most all the Auqaf employees are under matric or primary and most of them are non believer of shrine. They don’t have basic teachings and knowledge of Islam and this religious place. These employees just come here to perform their duties for earning. In this situation, the message of Islam and Faqar is not conveying by this institution rather than believes of pilgrims are mortifying.

People visit shrines for various purposes such as cure for illness, birth of child and financial problems (Kurin 1983). Sufi Shrines hold immense importance in society of Pakistan and believers of the shrines perform different rituals there (Abbas, et al. 2013). At the shrine of Hazrat Bari Imam, believers perform Lightning rituals including burning candle, charagh and agarbatti. They eat khok of much and applied it on wounds. They take lungar and eat this with the belief that it is sacred and heal their spirit. These religious rituals in which humans participate create an “aura of factuality” and deeper realities are reached (Geertz 1960). Similarly people use some specific colors (green, red and black) not only in their clothing but also in daily use like in flags, bangles, dalies and chadar at shrine to get spiritual effects on themselves.

Pakistani community allocates great importance to the Shrine of dead saints (Daniel and Pugh 1984) and has great faith upon them. The tradition of visiting sacred places to attain religious merit, washing off the sins and completion of desires and prayers (Mannat) are common practice across the world (Frembgen 2012). A man calls his God in cries for help, and marches toward Him, when he was in trouble and complexity, and then He bestows His blessing to him. Needs and difficulties force people to ask and beg (Najafi 2003). Similarly, pilgrims regularly perform certain activities and sometimes make Minnat (Khan and Sajid 2011) at shrine of Hazrat Bari Imam. Some ask children, some success and others pray for body and soul’s health. Bari Baba grants them their wishes and desires and when the wishes of believer fulfilled their relationship with spirituality and belief strengthens with Bari Baba. They come to shrine and as per gift present flowers because there is not a bigger gift than flower for a man. They also present different things at Shrines depending upon their socio-economic condition, including animals, money, gold, sweets, Daigs (food), milk, ghee, pitchers (gharolies), dalies, sehras etc for showing their love with buried Sufi and Allah(Batool, et al. 2014b). Believers also eat flowers and present there as their belief for spiritual peace. It’s only the belief of people and a way of satisfaction, which is one of the major characteristic of Shrine (Khan and Sajid 2011).
Culture is a complex whole which comprises knowledge, belief, morals, law, arts, custom, and every other capabilities and customs obtained by man as a member of society (Tylor 1871). But religion creates a moral order, which functions to sustain social control in the physical world. Beliefs and attitudes are socially learned (Bourdieu and Faubion 1975) and some paranormal beliefs are associated with strong religious beliefs (Stanke 2004).

Some religious beliefs have more resilience and are retained and culturally transmitted by humans (Scupin and DeCorse 2009). People adapt their actions and behaviors according to their observations and awareness (Kottak 2002). If we see the people in neighboring area of Shrine Hazrat Bari Imam, specific cultural traits are diffused in one way or the other in these people. They perform many rituals that are associated to in anyway. They don’t proceed anything without indulging Hazrat Bari Imam in their work and lives.

Some rituals are performed at each Wali’s shrine like burning candles and lamp, Fateha, spreading Chadars or flowers etc. Likewise these rituals practice here as well. Believers of Hazrat Bari Imam also bring wood on camels to light the much which is on since 300 years and never let it out. At shrine whoever comes to visit greet Hazrat Bari Imam by Fateha, Darood-o-Salma and Surah Yaseen. Red, green and black are the colors that usually used at the shrine and are diffused culturally. Particularly green color has more importance and is used in locale. Hazrat Bari Imam was generally used this color in clothing because it is the symbol of love and peace. When He came here, it was an asylum of criminals and famous as choorpur. He gave the message of Islam by their love and Hilam (mildness/kindness), and made this place a house of love and peace. So that people show their love for Hazrat Bari Imam by using this color. As well as dali and Urs rituals are also performed. These rituals are not only diffused in many other areas but also the evolution has occurred in forms. Like the children of Shah Muhammad Ghaus Lahori, believers of different areas also in groups to present Dali and other rituals at shrine. Rituals are still performed even when Urs is not held due to security reasons.

**CONCLUSION**

Different people have different opinion about shrine. But In religion Islam, shrines are the huge institution that are not just spreading a real message of Islam but also giving spiritual guidance and spiritual blessings (Faiz) to people. A special significance is always attached to those shrines which have served as the immense center of light, learning and spiritual culture (Rabbani 2005).

Village Noorpur Shahan is famous for the mirror-studded shrine of Hazrat Abdul Latif. People of this area are belongs to this shrine in all respects for instance religiously, economically, culturally and socially etc.

Government should have to play a constructive role and eradicate the present dispute. Furthermore in pursuance of shrine ritual and issues related to shrine, proceed steps with the consultation of Sajjada Nishine families for betterment and optimization. Shrine is a religious institution so that it is required; Auqaf will follow the path of buried Sufi Hazrat Bari Imam and spread the message of Islam through this religious institution.

Village Noorpur Shahan is situated in foot of Margalla hills and a beautiful lush green area of Islamabad. It is just behind the Prime Minister House Islamabad and about 4km northeast of the Diplomatic Enclave. Other nearest areas of this village are Quaid-i-Azam University, Bara Kahu, Saidpur and Mulpur village. But there is no any system, administration and development. They don’t have any hospital, bank, shopping center, water system and gas. As well as the condition of educational institutions and post office are not satisfactory. Government should have to notice its neighboring area and try to eliminate and resolve all these problems.

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